

40 WEEKS EARL BLUMENAUER #11 Neuroscience 40 IDEAS

Our brains affect every aspect of our daily lives – our thoughts, hopes, dreams and imagination, relationships, community, careers, and our sense of being. It is what makes us uniquely human. As the most complex living structure known, the study of the brain informs every aspect of our society – from the level of the individual, to our social networks and our environmental contexts. Wise decision-making is based on truly understanding the brain and the mind. From neurobiology to neuroethics, neurodevelopment to neurodegeneration, a better understanding of how our brains develop, work, and sometimes don't work, will have a huge impact on society.

The brain is the last great frontier of medical science and we need to focus on it now because neuroscience is at a historic turning point. A continuous stream of advances is shattering long-held notions about how the human brain works. These advances are also reshaping the landscapes of other fields, from psychology to economics, education to how we design and operate cities to be engines of creativity, and the law.

Despite these advances, currently one in three individuals is afflicted with a neurological or psychiatric disorder. There are more people with brain disorders than all cancer and heart problems combined. And as society ages, this number will increase exponentially as will the cost to the healthcare system and to the economy. These problems are the leading cause of disability, resulting in more hospitalizations and long-term care than all other disorders combined. From autism to Alzheimer's, neuroscience research is the only way to stem this growing epidemic. It is a looming disaster that is hanging over the heads – and brains – of the boomer generation. It is only through research that the causes, cures, and ultimately prevention of neurological and psychiatric disorders will be found. By unlocking the secrets of the brain, this research will improve the lives of all Americans and people around the world.

As part of the Oregon Health and Sciences University's Brain Awareness Week, The New York Times Magazine

In February 2010, when speaking at one of the OHSU Brain Institute Brain Awareness Lectures, Congressman Blumenauer announced the formation of the Congressional Neuroscience Caucus. Through the caucus, Members of Congress support funding quality neuroscience research, and work to make policies that maximize the medical and societal benefits of research. In that time, the caucus has held briefings ranging from traumatic brain injury, particularly among soldiers who have served our country in Iraq and Afghanistan to the growing brain, looking at how the brain develops from birth to adolescence.

The benefits gained from neuroscience research are broad and grows more exciting every day. In the coming months, the Congressional Neuroscience Caucus will focus on building the understanding and appreciation for neuroscience research by breaking down the silos between the many disease-specific organizations on the Hill and throughout Washington. That way, resources and focus can be leveraged for the larger goal of more game-changing discoveries in neuroscience that help our troops recover from TBI, save loved ones from Alzheimer's, heal our children from concussions, or help us better understand autism. Through briefings, roundtables and discussions, the Congressional Neuroscience Caucus will ensure Washington has no excuse to ignore or not support these important discoveries.

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